



Atlantic City Weekly

What's happening at the Jersey Shore

FREE

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NIGHTLIFE

Taking Shots

Pistol Pete's spectacle of a bar is a sight to be seen

By Robert Sumner

IT'S HARD TO DRIVE BY Pistol Pete's in Pleasantville and not be tempted to "hop off your saddle," and go in. Sporting some of the gaudiest decorations this side of Pee Wee's Playhouse, the Western-inspired saloon puts the décor of many other similarly themed bars to shame. A cowpoke mans a horse-drawn wagon near the entrance, which is boarded up in an Old West, "nailed-together" manner, with neon signs and wagon wheels hanging throughout. Stuffed animals lurk outside as if it were a taxidermist's petting zoo. You won't find creatures like these outside of Applebee's. "I tried to make a statement," says owner Peter Quarelli. "That's the way they do it in Vegas: character from the outside to the inside."

With all of the exterior amusement-park-like attractions, once inside you see more of the same over-the-top camp. Busts of an elk and a bull sneer over loads of memorabilia including guns in holsters, branding equipment, lassos, old whiskey jugs, photos and plenty of cacti scattered at various points throughout the bar.

"Ninety-five percent is all from Texas," says Quarelli. "People say it's more Texas than Texas!" The bar's Old West theme has been carefully put together by Quarelli himself, with many of the pieces coming as gifts from customers. "Someone will come in and say, 'I have some branding irons that would look great next to that spear,' and they would come back six months later, with the branding irons. While [he or she] is there I'll hang it up right where they

want them," says Quarelli.

I was kind of expecting, based on the exterior, a flashier, more cellophane-wrapped cowboy experience, not unlike a Disney theme park. But Pistol's is way more down-to-earth than that. It was a prototypical neighborhood bar inside what, on the outside, looked to be a bizarre Western museum. Waitresses sported Stetsons — along with some patrons — but the vibe was similar to one at your local corner bar — charming, friendly and a great place to stop in when you're looking for a place to have a good time.

Inspired after a trip to Las Vegas, Quarelli made sure that his place would attract passersby, but at the same time be warm and welcoming on the inside. "I asked all of the casino workers where they went on their nights off, and they all said, 'This little place in Sam's Town.' I thought the local people in AC needed a place like that," says Quarelli. Yet, this still isn't a place I would expect to hear people hop on stage and recite Broadway show tunes. Apparently Pistol Pete's is more than meets the dead-eye.

On Wednesdays and Saturdays, the bar hosts DJ Ronny and his "Extreme Karaoke" set, a wild amateur night exhibition where those brave enough to sing are awarded with gifts in exchange for their humiliation. The customers looking to make that tough transition from

Since September a restaurant has occupied the upstairs where Pistol Pete's After Dark used to be located.



PHOTOS BY STEVE MINNON

Servin' up sasparilla and tasty vittles with a smile and a tip of the Stetson at Pistol Pete's Saloon and Restaurant are Vikki Link (left) and Courtney Hill.

the privacy of their shower to the stage get a warm reception from the vivacious crowd. Those whose vocal tone isn't exactly meshing with the backing track

are pretty much drowned out by the music, thankfully, making some of the more cringe-

inducing contestants bearable. I couldn't quite figure out what made the karaoke "extreme," but, as always, it's quite fun to watch, and I'm sure equally fun to participate in. Karaoke is featured Thursday, Friday and Sunday nights as well.

For the past seven years Pistol Pete's had been strictly a bar, but since September a restaurant has occupied the upstairs where the previous nightclub attempt, Pistol Pete's After Dark, used to

be located. "A lot of customers didn't want to be in a saloon atmosphere," says Quarelli. The restaurant has become wildly successful and has led Quarelli to focus more on the food side, offering daily specials and even a lunch menu. Lunch offerings are priced as low as \$4.95 to go with \$1 beers and sodas. "Everybody has a happy hour, we have a happy lunch hour," says Quarelli. As for the infamous mechanical bull that the night club used to house, he is still inside, available for private parties only.

It's hard to miss Pistol Pete's as you cruise down the Black Horse Pike. Come in and it will be even harder to forget. ■

Pistol Petes is located at 1000 Black Horse Pike, Pleasantville. 484-1000. Visit online at pistolpetessaloon.com. Thurs. \$2 drinks, pints & shots. Happy hour is every day from 5-7pm. Sat., Wed. Extreme karaoke party. Mon. \$3 Margaritas and Coronas. Taco Tuesdays from 5pm, 75-cent tacos, \$3 tequilas.

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